

Birthday Lasagna

by Ben Summerton

Preparation time: 10mins

Cooking time: 1.5 hours

Ingredients, unless indicated, can be bought locally, from wherever. Otherwise, go to '[Where to buy stuff from](#)' for more details.

This is a recipe that takes on many various forms, and is one that, once familiar to you, you won't need the recipe. It is also therefore one that is difficult to stuff up! You just need to keep tasting and seasoning if necessary as you go.

I call it 'birthday' lasagna because this particular recipe is one that I committed to paper 3 years ago. It was a few days after Christmas and my whole family were crashing at my brother's house for a week or so. On Xmas night my brother (Ryan) comes running out into the lounge room calling for my sister Annie. Annie, a midwife and all round legend of the earth, goes in to assist my sister-in-law who had started going into labour. Sometime the next day baby Cheyenne was born and I became an uncle. This lasagna was made for the night or two later when Cheyenne had her first night at home. With everyone exhausted, I volunteered to cook! Here it is: Birthday Lasagna! The garlic is optional.

Note: I usually make double this, but our Seoul ovens are a little restrictive, so I've halved it to fit in the tray. I bought the smaller of the two available trays from *ilovecookie* (17.5x28cm...1.9L). Don't be tempted to buy the larger one. It doesn't fit!

Ingredients:

Pasta

500g beef mince (less expensive at *Costco*)

2 cans tomato, diced or chopped up a bit in the can

2 tbsp tomato paste - *ilovecookie*

4 cloves of garlic, diced/minced/rough chop

4-6 rashers of bacon, thinly sliced or roughly chopped - *ilovecookie*

1 tbsp sugar

1 onion, rough chop

red wine, some for the pan, some for the chef

packet of lasagna sheets - *ilovecookie* or *AK Plaza*

basil, torn up (fresh preferable, but dried is ok) - *AK Plaza* for fresh, *ilovecookie* for dried

olive oil, a good dash

salt and pepper

grated cheese, 3 handfuls at least

paprika (optional) - *Lotte Department Store*, *ilovecookie*

fresh thickened cream (optional)

White Sauce

Butter (approx. 100g)

500ml milk

nutmeg or mustard (in Seoul, you can get by without either of these though)

1/3 cup plain flour

Method

Mince:

Heat your oil in a large frying pan, or saucepan. The saucepan will take a little longer, but enables you to leave the stove for longer periods while it is cooking. Your choice. Add your onions and wait until they have softened just a little, then add your mince. Keep the heat low-medium and brown the meat. When you are roughly half way towards having the meat browned, add the bacon. When the meat is browned and bacon shows no sign of running back to the pan, add the tomatoes, tomato paste, sugar, paprika and garlic. Most people (I think) add the garlic in at the start, but I like the intensity of garlic, and in particular what it brings to the tomato. Again, you choose. But either way, now is the time to check your seasoning. Salt and pepper it and keep tasting. Add a decent little splash of wine and 2/3 of the basil. Start drinking the left over wine. Keep drinking for about 45 mins while your lasagna base simmers away (stir occasionally and turn your oven on about half way through this process). You will know when it is ready when the sauce develops a gloss. If you keep tasting all the way through this, you'll understand.

Sauce:

Ok, while all this is happening you have plenty of time to whip together a white sauce. This is one of those experimental processes, but really it is hard to stuff up. In a small saucepan, slowly melt a good chunk of butter and then about 1/3 cup of flour. Combine with a whisk or fork if you don't have one. When fully combined you'll either have a smooth ball or rough breadcrumbs. Now, while stirring, start adding your milk very gradually. Keep whisking or stirring until all your milk is used up and it starts to simmer. It should be thickened, but thin enough to be able to pour. Adjust milk if too thick, simmer a bit longer if too thin. When finished, switch the flame off, add your cheese, salt, pepper and nutmeg (or mustard).

Assemble:

When all this is ready and your oven is set to 180 C, lay your first set of lasagna sheets on the pan, then add mince, then sauce then a sprinkle of cheese. Repeat until you have exhausted your supply of sheets. A bit of maths at the start will tell you how many layers you can make! To cap it off, pour a decent drizzle of thickened cream on the top layer is the best, but the alternative of course is to use the remaining white sauce you made. A good spread of cheese (some mozzarella in the mix is a good thing), the remaining basil and light dusting of paprika are all that remain. Stick it in the oven for about 45mins, or until the cheese is golden brown on top.